

Testimony before the

Committee On Appropriations

Regarding HB 7027: An Act Concerning the State
Budget for the Biennium June 30, 2019

Stephen Tracy
February 23, 2017

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Stephen Tracy, and I reside at 203 Ivy Mountain Road in Goshen, Connecticut. I am here today to comment on the proposed state budget as it pertains to services and care for the disabled.

My eldest son, Christopher, has been well served by a group home operated by Ability Beyond for the past 26 years. I am also proud to serve on the organization's Board of Directors. When Christopher was born, my wife and I were told not to expect much for him. He would never walk. He would never speak. He would never have anything approaching a "normal" life. We were encouraged by some to place him in an institution.

Christopher did eventually learn to walk, at the age of nine. While he never learned to speak, he has had a lot to say over the years about what it means to be a son, a brother and a friend. We had the privilege of raising him at home until he turned twenty, at which time we were fortunate to find a place for him in an Ability Beyond group home in New Milford. There, he and three other disabled men live about as normal a life as their circumstances permit. He has a volunteer assignment with Meals on Wheels. He ventures into town to shop. He participates in sporting events. He goes to church. He has friends.

Ability Beyond is one of several outstanding non-profit organizations that care for disabled men and women throughout our state. We chose an Ability group home for our son because we knew the organization had been founded by parents and was dedicated to providing quality service in a family setting. We have not been disappointed.

Like every other family member that you have heard from today, I want to urge you to do all that you can to provide adequate financial support for our fellow citizens who must make their way in the world each day despite significant physical or mental disadvantages. But I want to focus on one particular and important step that you can take in this direction now. That is to reverse Connecticut's decades long practice of underfunding the private non-profit organizations that serve the disabled in comparison with the funding support that has been extended to government operated programs. This practice has extended through Democrat and Republican administrations as well, through good economic times and bad. It didn't make sense twenty years ago – and it certainly doesn't make sense today.

Because they operate on a much more cost efficient basis than state operated institutions, Connecticut's non-profit providers offer the opportunity to realize cost savings while extending service to the thousands of disabled individuals who are urgently awaiting care. And, more importantly, you can do this while assuring the level of care and personal concern that my family and I have experienced at Ability Beyond for over twenty-five years. I urge you to provide Connecticut's non-profit providers with funding equal to that of the state's publicly run programs, and to continue and accelerate the conversion of services to the non-profit provider community. This makes sense for our taxpayers and our loved ones as well.

Thank you.